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Prevention of Coronary Heart Disease

Your records suggest that you may be at risk of developing heart disease or suffering a stroke. There is strong evidence that changes in lifestyle can prevent heart disease. Please read the following. There are many things that you can do to keep your heart healthy. If you make positive changes then your risk of Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) will be lower.

What is Coronary Heart Disease?

Coronary heart disease happens when the coronary arteries become gradually narrowed and hardened.

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood in your arteries. You need a certain amount of pressure in your body to keep the blood flowing. The target for the general population is to have a blood pressure below 140/85. For people who have had a heart attack or a stroke, or who have CHD or diabetes, the target is to have a blood pressure below 130/80.

What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure – also known as hypertension – is when your blood pressure is constantly higher than the recommended level. If you have high blood pressure you run a higher risk of having a heart attack or a stroke.

High blood pressure rarely makes people feel ill, so the only way of knowing if you have high blood pressure is to have it measured.

What causes high blood pressure?

In nine out of ten people, there is no definite cause of high blood pressure. However the following can all play a part

- Not doing enough physical activity
- Being overweight
- Having too much salt in your diet
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Not eating enough fruit and vegetables

Genes are another factor. So if one or both of your parents have (or had) high blood pressure, you are at more risk of developing it too.

What can you do?

If you have high blood pressure it is essential to control it. Even reducing your blood pressure by a small amount can lower your risk of problems in the future. To reduce your blood pressure, or prevent it from getting high, you can do the following things

- Do more physical activity
- Keep to a healthy weight
- Cut down on salt
- Cut down on alcohol
- Eat more fruit and vegetables

If you do develop high blood pressure your doctor may prescribe medicine to help reduce your blood pressure and protect your heart. Please seek advice initially from our Practice Nurse.

Smoking is a major cause of heart disease. People who smoke are almost twice as likely to have a heart attack as people who have never smoked. If you are a smoker stopping smoking is the single most important step you can take to reduce the risk of having a heart attack and to live longer.

Stop smoking now!

We know that this is not always so easy but contact us to make an appointment with our Practice Nurse.

Managing your weight - Carrying a lot of extra weight as fat can greatly affect your health. Carrying extra weight may put a strain on your heart and if you are overweight you run an increased risk of developing diabetes. Crash diets do not usually work.

Healthy eating and Weight loss - Eat a healthy, balanced diet. Your diet should be low in saturated fat, sugar and salt and contain plenty of fruit and vegetables (at least five portions a day).

Fish such as herring, kippers, mackerel, pilchards, salmon, sardines and trout contain oils that can reduce the risk of thrombosis. Many vegetables, fruit and cereals contain antioxidant vitamins (beta-carotene and vitamins C and E) that prevent saturated fats from being changed into cholesterol. Other foods that may help to lower your cholesterol level are beans, peas, lentils and oats because they contain soluble fibre and Brazil nuts.

Exercise - Getting active is one way of cutting your risk of heart disease

The key points

- Try to build exercise into your daily routine – start gradually
- Consider going for brisk walks
- Walk instead of using public transport or a car
- Stay within your limits – if you develop chest pain seek medical advice immediately
- 30 minutes of exercise building up to 5 times per week is an ideal but maybe start with 2 sessions for 15 minutes a week
- You don't have to take up a sport or join a gym

Alcohol - There is now a wealth of evidence showing that light to moderate drinkers have lower heart disease incidence and live longer. Most studies show a benefit with 1-2 drinks a day.

Reduce your alcohol consumption. If you drink make sure that you stick to the recommended guidelines for alcohol consumption. The recommended daily amount of alcohol for men is 3-4 units a day, and it is 2-3 units for women. You should always avoid binge drinking.

Thank you for reading this leaflet. Further advice is available from our Practice Nurse.

